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ROTESTANTISM

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By

R. MERCER WILSON, M.A.

Author of "Before the Reformation"
Editor of "Vital Themes"

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ITS FUNDAMENTAL BASIS

"THE Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this realm of England," says Article XXXVII. The Bishop of Rome describes his own Church in a very recent official statement as the Holy "Roman Catholic Apostolic Church." We describe ourselves as belonging to a Church which is "Catholic, Apostolic, Protestant and Reformed." There is less contradiction in the conjunction of the terms Protestant and Catholic than there is in the conjunction of the terms Roman and Catholic; for the term "Protestant" does not suffer from the limitation of locality which is associated with the term "Roman." When Romanists insist on the omission of the adjective Roman, they are censuring the language of their official head.

Catholic, but not Roman

We rejoice, let me say at the outset, in the ground which is common to the Church of Rome and the Church of England—the Old and New Testaments, the three Creeds, the Councils

Œcumenical of the undivided Church; herein lies a message of real Catholicity. But this rejoicing is always and severely tempered by the sorrow which is inevitable when we see that ground covered on Rome's part by a structure of many unlovely stories built in unseemly proportions, these later additions tending to spoil the original splendid and solid base. When the Church of Rome spoke Greek, her doctrinal position was simpler and stronger than when the days of her Latinity began, which leads me to reiterate the remark of Professor Gwatkin, that "the Church of the second century was neither Protestant nor Romanist, because neither of these specialities had yet been developed." The same authority calls attention to the astonishingly modern character of the disputed questions in the second century, which is true, in so far as the conditions of the second century are the recurring conditions of all ages. The millenarians, the computers of the number of the beast and of the end of the world, the vegetarians, the teetotallers who refuse the Eucharistic wine, thought-readers, spiritualists, mediums, conjurers, hypnotists, were all there, and it would be difficult to find a heresy of which the Gnostics did not have some little "soupçon."

The Situation in the Second Century

There were germs of evil in prayers for the dead, in the exaggerated admiration of martyrs,

in the unhealthy attention paid to the physical facts of fasting and virginity; but they were no more than germs at the time. *We find no traces of Papal jurisdiction, but abundant signs that every Church in Christendom would have resented any such claim as a piece of arrogance. The infallibility of Councils is unknown to this age and the next. The supremacy of Scripture is everywhere taken for granted;* and if Scripture is nowhere directly opposed to tradition, neither is tradition anywhere made an independent source of doctrine. There is no trace of a sacrificing priesthood till after Irenæus and Clement of Alexandria; and Cyprian himself strictly limits that priesthood to the bishop, and calls the presbyters no more than Levites. Sacrifice is commonly spoken of, but only the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and the altar, Irenæus tells us, is in heaven. The bread of the Lord's Supper is no longer common bread; it is "bread with a blessing," but still bread, for nobody dreams of anything like transubstantiation, unless it be a few Gnostics. "Thus [says Professor Gwatkin] the Church of the second century meets the current Latin doctrine of the Middle Ages with a negative protest of silence and of contrary teaching and example" (*The Church, Past and Present*, pp. 30, 31).

The Fourth and Fifth Centuries

Passing from the second century to the fourth and fifth, when Latin Christianity became distinct from Greek, we may say that the chief

contributing factors to this emergence were the scholarly labours of Jerome, the teaching and personality of Augustine, and the administrative genius of the bishops of Rome. In 404, Jerome finished his great work of translating the Hebrew Bible into Latin—the version which was finally accepted as authoritative at the Council of Trent. With all his faults, Jerome must be admired for his real enthusiasm for learning and for his appreciation of the value of Hebrew, which had little or no support from contemporary prejudices. It is no disparagement of his work to repeat what is often forgotten, that *Jerome's "Vulgate" would have been quite impossible but for Origen's "Hexapla"; the scholarship of the Greek Church went before and was indispensable.* Rome did not produce great intellects, theological leaders, such as Alexandria, Carthage and Antioch produced; but this failure served to enhance the dignity of the See, for those who occupied the episcopal chair at Rome developed administrative ability to the highest degree and chose the more secure position of umpires, while leaders from other centres were engaged in the arena of controversy. When Rome fell before the invading Goths in 410, it is not to be wondered at that the prestige of the former mistress of the world came to be centred more and more in the personality of her bishop, especially when her bishop happened to be such an outstanding man as Leo the Great. He was an iron man in an iron age, and we gladly pay tribute to his work in preparing the Church to survive the

crash of a falling world. But the grace which made him great did not keep him from arrogance, and he could denounce with wanton inconsiderateness those who dared to question his authority in any way. His strong tendency to self-aggrandisement is noticeable also in his illustrious successor at the end of the sixth century, Gregory the Great, the last of the Latin Fathers, the man who laid the foundations of medieval theology.

Gregory's Protests

In him we may say that *the Church of the sixth or early seventh century meets the current Latin doctrine of the Middle Ages with a protest of contrary teaching and example on at least two points.* He was a missionary bishop; and when Augustine, whom he sent to Canterbury, wrote to him for advice on points of policy and administration, he advised Augustine to use whatever liturgy was most likely to be suitable for the English. This was a recognition of the principle that national Churches are free to develop their own liturgical settlement; but unfortunately it was not carried out. Again, in the unlovely rivalry between Constantinople and Rome, which was accentuated by the 28th Canon of the Council of Chalcedon, Gregory followed Leo in strongly resenting the assertiveness of the brilliant metropolis on the Bosphorus. When John the Faster, in summoning a Synod at Constantinople in 588, assumed the title of "Universal Bishop," Gregory's indignation outstepped the

bounds of calm utterance, as he prayed that Almighty God would confound such hypocrisy. He pointed out that the title was a novelty, a contravention of the Gospel which enjoins humility, and that it deprived the other patriarchs and bishops of the honour due to them. In all of which he was a Protestant by anticipation.

Positive and Negative Inseparable

Coming now more closely to the word "Protestant," let us dissociate ourselves from the loose talk which prevails in many quarters as to the unsatisfactoriness of a negative term. *Positive and negative are as inextricably woven together in the web of Protestantism as they are in the web of life.* Positive and negative, outside and inside, convex and concave, go together. The people who despise negations and abhor controversy are strangely inconsistent. If they preach the truth, they are exposing error; whenever they wash their faces, it is a controversy with dirt; whenever they wear overcoats, it is a controversy with cold or wind or rain; whenever they turn on the light, it is a controversy with darkness; whenever they have bacon for breakfast, they are enjoying the fruits of the Apostle Paul's successful controversy with the Judaizers of his day; and in partaking of the benefits of British citizenship they are reaping the harvest of the great controversies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Moreover, we do well to remember that when

the greatest minds in the Church of the fifth century sought to express the truth concerning God Incarnate, they used four privative terms which have served to guide successive generations of theologians ever since, ἀσυγχύτως ἀτρέπτως ἀδιαιρέτως ἀχωρίστως (without confusion, without change, without division, without separation).

Historically, the word "Protestant" is associated with the Protest of the Reformed States at the Second Diet of Spires in 1529. This decidedly positive document urged that the unanimous decision of one Diet (1526) could not be rescinded by a majority in a second Diet (1529), and appealed from this injustice to the Emperor, to the next free General Council of Christendom, or to an ecclesiastical congress of the German nation. The Protesters pledged themselves to defend each other, if attacked by the Roman Authorities on account of God's Word. Etymologically, the word emphasizes the positive element, to bear witness for or on behalf of. And, as we have seen already, the *thing*, the attitude, the standpoint, existed long before the *name* was coined.

Protestants before the Reformation

There were potential Protestants from the earliest days of the Church, and there were actual Protestants for centuries before the Reformation movement of the sixteenth century; witness the Waldensians and Albigenses, who cherished the

words of the Gospel in spite of all the terrors of medieval Church authorities, and who have their Churches and Sunday Schools to this very hour in Italy; witness Jerome of Prague, Hus of Bohemia, Grosseteste of Lincoln, Wycliffe of Oxford and Lutterworth, and many another.

"Protestants" in the Vulgate!

We may, however, go much farther back and find the word in all its richness enshrined in the pages of the Vulgate—"Quos protestantes illi avdire nolebant" (which witnesses they (the people) were unwilling to hear) (2 Chron. xxiv. 19). *This employment of the word in the Vulgate,* as Mr. Prescott Upton points out, *is the highest use of it.* It applies the Word to the prophets of the Old Testament, the men who bore witness to the truth of God, and in so doing exposed the erroneous opinions and sinful practices of the people. This brings the Word into the centre of the New Testament. The "Good News" is a Person, not a formula nor a system, and the Apostles as witnesses to Him Who is "The Truth" could not but tell of the things which they had seen and heard. They had experienced the power and love of the living Christ in their own lives. The secret of pardon and peace was theirs, the power which could deliver men who, "through fear of death," had been "all their lifetime subject to bondage" was theirs. That was the secret and that was the power which made the "Acts

of the Apostles," which are the "Acts of the Holy Ghost."

The Outcome of Personal Experience

When we come to the Reformation of the sixteenth century, it is another chapter in the "Acts of the Apostles" which are the "Acts of the Holy Ghost." It has its roots in the discovery of the same secret and the same power; that is to say, it was not doctrine, but the pressing religious need of an anxious, throbbing heart, which led to the great movement of the sixteenth century. Luther's deliverance from the torturing doubts which so long beset him, his experience in coming to a living trust in a living Saviour who is accessible to all men, this is the religious soul of the Reformation. "*Justification by faith*" *and* "*the universal priesthood of believers*" *are the favourite terms in theology for the expression of these basic principles, and they were the living power of the movement.*

Professor Harnack's Testimony

"Rising above all anxieties and terrors, above all ascetic devices, above all directions of theology, above all interventions of hierarchy and sacraments, Luther ventured to lay hold of God Himself in Christ, and in this act of faith, which he recognized as God's work, his whole being obtained stability and firmness, nay, even a personal joy and certainty, which no medieval Christian had

ever possessed." This statement of Harnack (*History of Dogma*, vii. 183) is no exaggeration. Luther had known the burden and the dread; he had tried the various remedies and helps of the medieval system, but it was not thereby that he gained the freedom of a Christian man; the common people knew this, for he took them into his confidence, which was in part the secret of his successful leadership.

The Leadership of Luther

As Professor Lindsay (*History of Reformation*, vol. i. p. 191) puts it, "Men and women could *see* what faith was when they looked at Luther." He was a concrete example of deliverance from the paralysis of dubiety and fear. It is only when we remember the multiplied and burdensome exactions of the medieval system that we appreciate how great and blessed was the measure of liberty which Luther demonstrated by his God-given independence. This is the context of Professor James's remark that "Luther rendered a great service to humanity" when he "swept away the whole idea of a profit and loss account with God." The overmastering conviction that the initiative lies with God Who is a God of love, Whose *grace* triumphs over man in his unworthiness; the great discovery that we are accepted before God not for any real or imagined merits in ourselves, but because we commit ourselves to His dear Son, placing all our hopes for time and

for eternity in Him; the deep realization that the same Spirit who inspired the written page can speak to our hearts and give us the assurance that the message is true, so that "the Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit"; the affirmation—made with humility but with enthusiasm also—"I know Whom I have believed"; this is the secret of that mighty revolution that changed the current of European thought and practice, and inaugurated a reign of righteousness that could be seen in the lives of multitudes of men and women.

The Bible Rediscovered

Thus men learnt something infinitely higher and better than the vexatious uncertainties of medievalism when they learnt from the New Testament the dignity of the laity, the independence of their manhood, the universal priesthood of believers. To say that men learnt this from the New Testament is to point out that *the Reformation was a rediscovery of the Bible.* The favourite quotation of medieval Church authorities on the subject of vernacular versions of the Scriptures was "nolite sanctum dare canibus," and Miss Deanesly, in her *Lollard Bible* (p. 372), has summed up the position very fairly when she describes the attitude of the medieval Church to Biblical translations as "one of toleration in principle, and distrust in practice. Latin Christianity was founded on St. Jerome's translation of the Vulgate, and

could not well forget it. The Eastern Church preserved the primitive attitude in the matter, and did not interfere in the making of Russian or Bulgarian translations. The first hostile pronouncement of the Western Church to translations was that of Gregory VII. From his time onwards the orthodox prejudice against lay knowledge of the Biblical text hardened, except in the case of the most exalted personages. Germany was the only country in Europe where orthodoxy allowed the study of Biblical translations to lay people before the Reformation, and this only from about 1509 onwards, when the principles of the Renaissance were already bearing fruit, in a soil specially prepared by the earlier efforts of the Waldensians, Beghards, Gottesfreunde and Brethren of the Common Life."

Sir Thomas More's Testimony

"In England, as in the rest of Europe, the great majority of those familiar with the text of the Bible in English were Lollards, and Sir Thomas More recognized the general state of affairs when he made his Messenger complain that 'the Bible is in so few folks' hands.' "

The message of the Bible as God's revelation of Himself to all men everywhere had all the authority of freshness. The individual could hear God speaking to him in the Scriptures as a man speaks with his fellows. Previously the laity could hardly be blamed for being lost in the bogland

of the fourfold sense of the Church's interpretation (literal, moral, allegorical and anagogic); the priests themselves were lost in it.

Medieval Church Barriers

The Church which had interposed the priesthood between the sinner and the Saviour, interposed also its authoritative method of interpretation between the believer and the Bible. It was not necessary to know or understand what the Church said, but it was necessary to accept and believe what the Church said. Faith was not trust in a Person, but assent to correct propositions concerning God and man and the universe; the Church's interpretation was infallible, and that was what really mattered.

Reason Reinstated

Here we may say that *Protestantism stands for the reinstatement of reason in its proper place, in contrast to the blind, unquestioning obedience required by the Church in the Middle Ages.*

It has often been said that the Reformers substituted an infallible Bible in place of infallible Popes and Councils of the Church, but this is more true of their followers than of the Reformers themselves. They were free from what might be called idolatrous acceptance of Bible authority. They recognized that the Scriptures require an

obedience which is not blind, but seeing. They believed the Scriptures, not because the Scriptures said so, but because God told them that the Scripture-words were His. Over and over again they make clear the distinction between a false blind Scripture authority—an idolatrous obedience, a faith in advance, an antecedent *sacrificium intellectus*—and what they called *autopistia*, i.e. one's own hearing, one's own conviction of God speaking in the Scripture. That is to say, the Bible is credited, not because others say that it is God's word, but because we hear God Himself say so.

The Church as represented by its authorities was more concerned with Gratian's "Decretum" than with the Gospel; but when men and women got the Bible for themselves, they began to exercise their minds by putting into practice the Apostolic precept, "Prove all things, hold fast that which is good." So they rejected the word of man when it went against the Word of God. The Reformers' experience of what the Bible was to them overthrew the medieval idea of the Scriptures.

The Scriptures for the Individual

The Bible gave them a new home for a new life within which they could enjoy intimate fellowship with God Himself. No longer a dead letter or a storehouse of doctrinal truths or a cold law-book, the Scriptures are the personal revelation of God's love to *me*; they bring Jesus Christ near

to me, and Jesus Christ fills the whole sphere of God. The authoritative character of this revelation lies in the realm of the spirit. *There is no supremacy or self-sufficiency of reason. Reason by itself cannot do the work; reason by itself is not adequate to the recognition of this truth; it is reason attentive and obedient to the Divine Spirit.*

"True Christian faith is not content with a simple historical knowledge, but takes its seat in the heart of man" (Calvin, *Institutes*). "All the arguments in the world, if unaccompanied by the work of the Holy Spirit on the heart, will fail to produce the faith which piety requires" (*Ibid.*, l. vii. 4).

The "Witness of the Spirit"

Luther insists on this, and Calvin is *par excellence* the master of this precious doctrine, "Testimonium Spiritus Sancti." "The principle of the testimony of the Spirit as the true basis of our confidence in the Scriptures as the Word of God was almost from the hands of Calvin himself incorporated into the Reformed Creeds" (Professor Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism*, p. 125). The recognition of Holy Scripture's full and final authority is awakened in the heart of the believer by that operation which they called the "witness of the Spirit." *The Reformers' doctrine of the Bible and the Reformers' doctrine of the Holy Spirit must always be taken together;* whenever they are divorced it leads to a serious loss.

Barth and Brunner have drawn attention to this; and, without accepting all the implications of Barthianism, we may be very thankful for their splendid emphasis on these points. As Brunner puts it (*The Word and the World*, p. 89), "the revelation of God is not a *perfectum* (i.e. something finished and done with) as the orthodox see it; what would a perfect and finished something, that was and is no more, be for me to-day? But the revelation of God is, if I may say so, a *perfectum praesens*—that which happened then and there in Jesus Christ, and *also* that which as such God is saying to me here to-day. Hence the statement that God's Word speaks to us in the Holy Scriptures has at once to be supplemented by adding that the Word of the Bible is the Word of *God* to *us* only in so far as God's Holy Spirit opens our ears so that we can hear His voice in the words of the Apostles—something which at no time can be taken for granted. Bible without Spirit is orthodoxy; Spirit without Bible is mysticism or rationalism. Scripture and the Holy Spirit as one—this was the conception of true revelation which was held by the Reformers."

THE BIBLE COUPLED WITH TRADITION?

We may say then that Protestantism has its fundamental basis in the Bible, not a translation of a

translation like the Vulgate, but going back to the original documents in the Bible as far as possible, not the Bible as an independent divine thing, a *corpus mortuum* before which we fall down and worship, not the Bible coupled with Tradition, as is mistakenly suggested by the recent Eastern Churches Joint Commission, but *the Bible as the living present voice of God, speaking to us through the same Spirit who inspired the Word.* For the Reformers, the authority of the Word lay in the realm of spiritual experience rather than in the realm of intellectual propositions.

The Sphere of the Scriptures' Authority

In their ability to make man "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus," the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are full and final, inerrant and inexhaustible. This authority is independent of questions that may be raised concerning the human agencies through which the sacred books come into their present shape. When Luther spoke of the Scriptures as "the crib wherein Christ is laid" he avoided the mistake of identifying the earthen vessel with its precious contents. We may say with Brunner "this earthen vessel was designed by God to become the receptacle of peculiar contents, the bearer of a history and a message which no other human book contains. He who confuses the message with the material in which the message is written is foolish. But he who,

because of this earthen material, despises the message is much more foolish."

Scientific Criticism

This is what the rationalist does; he throws away the *pearls* because they are covered with sand. But Luther used his critical understanding with reverence and godly fear, and so may we. Sometimes we worry ourselves needlessly over the findings of modern science, and we tremble for the Ark of God. But this is to forget that scientific criticism cannot touch our Spirit-breathed conviction that the Scriptures are a testimony that Jesus Christ is the Word of God. The breakdown of Biblical faith in these days is due rather to the modern philosophy of man's self-sufficiency and independence of God than to any findings of science. The real struggle is not one between belief and science, but between belief and unbelief.

The Early Fathers

Again, we may see in Protestantism the reinstatement of reason in its proper place when we consider *the appeal to antiquity* which was made by the Reformers. To think of the Reformation as a complete break with the past is not in keeping with all the facts. There is no such thing as an absolute destruction of continuity. For good or ill we are the heirs of all the ages. Private judg-

ment is not synonymous with individual caprice or arbitrariness, nor is it incompatible with a strong historical sense. The Reformers were not insensible to the labours of those who had gone before. Their writings make far more copious use of the Early Fathers than do their modern successors. As little could any Churchman match Calvin in his patristic lore as in his Scriptural knowledge.

Rome's Modern Creed

The other Reformers also exercised their God-given reason in making their appeal to Scripture and to antiquity, with the result that they rejected the distinctive doctrines of the medieval Church, such as the sacrifice of the Mass, transubstantiation, compulsory auricular confession, worship of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints, Purgatory, indulgences and other practices which are summed up in the new Creed of 1562, which is associated with the name of Pope Pius IV.

Was Reform Possible from Within?

In making this rejection the Reformers were obliged to separate themselves from the existing system. Some critics are fond of saying that the Reformation should have been brought about from within, and that there should have been no breaking away. Bishop Creighton thought that the changes of the sixteenth century might have been brought

about without any breach of Christian continuity. The answer to this criticism is that *every attempt at reform from within was ruthlessly suppressed by the authorities.* We have only to read St. Odo of Cluny, the story of the Fraticelli, the history of the Cistercians, to realize that members of Religious Orders who were bent on improvement and reform were persecuted and burnt to death just as mercilessly as those who were called heretics, until desire for better things gave place to despair in the hearts of many noble-minded men and women.

The Fate of Savonarola

"Luther himself," says Professor Villari (*Life and Times of Savonarola*, p. 771), "could scarcely have been so successful in inaugurating his Reform, had not the sacrifice of Savonarola given a final proof that it was hopeless to hope in the purification of Rome."

Other Factors in the Reformation

It was through Savonarola that John Colet received fresh impulses to study Scripture and returned to Oxford to lecture on St. Paul in a new way, bringing out for his hearers the *personal* message of the Apostle. The Lollards gladly listened to the Dean's preaching. He it was who persuaded Erasmus to turn from purely classical studies to the New Testament and the Early

Fathers. He it was who tutored William Tyndale. The mention of these things shows that many other forces were at work to bring about the desired Reformation, quite independently of the absurd allegation that Luther's want of a wife and Henry the Eighth's want of a change of wife explain the whole movement. Besides the refusal of the Church to reform herself and mend her evil ways, the break-up of feudalism, the advent of the middle classes, the revival of learning, the Greek manuscripts that poured into Europe after the Fall of Constantinople in 1453, the growing spirit of nationalism—these all contributed to the inevitableness of the mighty movement of emancipation which took place in the new Europe of the sixteenth century.

The Growth of Freedom

And how did it work out? It worked out in a mixed world, with many imperfections and many setbacks, for the liberty of the subject increasingly. It made its protest along two lines which have often been set forth in popular form as "No priest between the soul and the Saviour," "No Pope between the sovereign and the subject." This Protestantism, standing for personal religion as against mechanical righteousness, standing for the liberty of the subject as against the unhappy servitude of the Middle Ages, produced positive results of the first magnitude. It entered like iron into the blood of the peoples of Northern Europe and

raised up great, free, God-fearing people. Wherever these principles are honoured there is progress, the advancing tide of knowledge and ordered liberty. On the subject of slavery itself, the first medieval theologian who raised his voice in real protest was the heretic Wycliffe, and Wycliffe's successors in the Protestant nations have led the way in the abolition of the slave-trade, as they have in other humanitarian and philanthropic enterprises.

Modern Romanticists

Protestantism brought moral and spiritual liberties in its train which many fail to appreciate by reason of the long time they have enjoyed them: liberty from sacerdotal tyranny, liberty from ecclesiastical taxation, liberty from the demands of a millionaire Church which almost crushed the people out of existence. Romanticists, like Cardinal Gasquet, G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc, paint rosy pictures of the Middle Ages as if they were Golden Ages when everyone was happy; but those who face the facts know differently. Professor G. G. Coulton's *Five Centuries of Religion*, or a recent novel like *Unrecorded*, by Mrs. R. S. Garnett, gives a picture which is much closer to life as it actually was in those days.

Lord Acton's Verdict

That eminent historian, Lord Acton, pointed out in his Inaugural Address at Cambridge that

progress in the direction of organized and assured freedom is the characteristic fact of modern history, mentioning representation, the extinction of slavery, the reign of opinion, the security of weaker groups, liberty of conscience, as evidences that the idea of progress is not a mere chimera of the imagination. This view seems preferable to the melancholy outlook of Comte, Carlyle, Newman and Froude, who find that there is no progress justifying the ways of God to man. And he frankly states (*Lectures on Modern History*, p. 9), "*At the end of the nineteenth century, the three most important countries were those that chiefly belonged to the conquests of the Reformation; and the centre of gravity, moving from the Mediterranean nations to the Oceanic, from the Latin to the Teuton, had also passed from the Catholic to the Protestant.*"

Protestantism at Work To-day

Nor is Protestantism exhausted by the making of this frank avowal. It is at work to-day, and it has a great contribution to make in this present age. In the emergence of Barthianism, in the resurrection of the spirit of Jan Hus in Czechoslovakia, in the rejection of the Bishops' or Deposited Prayer Book in 1928–9, we have a few evidences of its working here and there. Sometimes the Reformation is severely criticized because of its political wrappings or trammels. It is said that when the Reformers overthrew the organized tyranny of the Church, they rendered

more absolute the domination of the State, and thereby crippled spiritual activity for a long time. The answer to this is that, in countries where the Reformation obtains, the widest freedom is enjoyed by the individual in relation to Church and State. In England, if the Commons had accepted the dictation of the National Assembly and passed the Bishops' Prayer Book, the decision would have been divinely inspired in the view of the Church authorities, and all the talk about Disestablishment would not have been heard.

Cranmer's Polity

As between Separatism and Jurisdictionalism, there is still something to be said in favour of a modified form of Jurisdictionalism. Calvin placed the Church above the State; but Cranmer and his colleagues preferred to subject ecclesiastical officers to the control of their prince or ruler, that he should administer ecclesiastical offices through his bishops and clergy, just as he administered civil justice through his judges and lawyers. Needless to say, the Reformers were not perfect, and they could not foresee all the possible consequences of their actions.

Ruffini's Verdict

Ruffini's tribute gives a fairer estimate when he says (*Religious Liberty*, p. 59), "*if the men of*

the Reformation did little or nothing for the cause of toleration, the principles which they laid down did everything, since from these principles at the opportune moment and in more favourable conditions as to environment, religious liberty was able to make a triumphant appearance."

Let us thank God afresh to-day for our inheritance in Protestantism, which carries with it the great truths of an open Bible, a Divine Lord, an atoning Saviour, justification by faith, sanctification by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and good works wrought in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prophetic versus Sacerdotal

And let us remember that the essential expression of it is, and must ever be, the preaching of the Word. *The prophetic as contrasted with the priestly conception is at the very heart of Protestantism. It seeks to recover from the traditions of the past and to manifest in the changed conditions of to-day the spirit of Apostolic Christianity.* We need a revival of the prophetic function of the ministry, if the type of Church that developed from the Reformation is to recover authority. In many places the modern Church has failed to inspire confidence because of uncertainty in its message, and a confused idea of its vocation. There has been a ready yielding to secular influences, there has been a shifting of the emphasis from redemption to the more popular programme of social religion, there has

been an attempt to combine the priestly with the prophetic functions, which has spelt weakness.

Wanted Aggressive Believers

When we study the Apostolic age, we see that there was a Jewish Church which clung to Palestine, and a Gentile Church under the leadership of the Apostle Paul. The former shrank and withered, the latter went out boldly to meet the world, and lived dangerously and carried the message of the transforming power of a crucified and risen and almighty Saviour to the heart of the civilized world. In subsequent ages a change came. Enthusiasm cooled, divided counsels increased, the impulse to retire from the world showed a loss of nerve; asceticism and monasticism became fashionable; the struggle of the prophetic with the priestly spirit led to the triumph of the latter, which reached its climax in the Middle Ages.

When the Reformation came, it was a rejection of the priestly type in favour of that found in the New Testament, an intelligent rejection based upon a profound spiritual experience. "*Pure Protestantism, inspired by the Evangelical tradition and functioning through the might of the prophetic conception of the ministry, needs no altar other than that of the contrite heart and no priesthood other than that of all believers. In so far as we are loyal to this conception, we shall fulfil our function in present-day life*" (Professor H. E. Kirk, *The Spirit of Protestantism*, p. 212).

We have no human, infallible authority, but we have the Bible and the Holy Spirit and a teaching ministry.

A Call for Courage

Infallibility is the dream of the weak and the solace of the coward. Protestantism calls to the manhood in us, telling us that we cannot roll our responsibilities on to other people's shoulders, that the burden of decision must be ours, that there is no easy short-cut to certainty, that we must grapple with life's many problems for ourselves. Better far the pressure and the perplexity and the aching cry, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" than the fatal torpor of those who sleep the sleep of mental acquiescence. Rome may taunt us with our unhappy divisions, but it ill becomes her to do so. Our very existence is an evidence that her claim to determine all controversies and settle all doubts is an unreality.

Protestant Solidarity Weak

Protestantism does indeed need to recover its solidarity, and this can best be done by reconsidering its spirit. Originally the Church was an association of believers who went forth with a divine message to a lost world. The Apostles and their immediate successors were preachers, not priests. And our apostolic succession lies in our oneness in the great High Priest of our profession,

in the priesthood of all believers, in the unity of the work of evangelizing the world by going to it with the message of salvation. Hence we derive our Church consciousness, and the vitality of communion with Christ may be measured by the thoroughness with which the Church carries its message to all men.

This message is the same, yet ever different. It may alter in its emphases and expressions from one generation to another, but it is still "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." The downward force of modern secularism can surely be met with another and a greater force.

The Spirit's Power Available Still

The Gospel that transformed Corinthian libertines into saints of God, that purged the corrupt currents of the Middle Ages and led on to our modern free institutions, can again transform the life of peoples into communities of worshippers, children of light and of the resurrection. To quote Professor Kirk, "In view of the fact that Protestantism expresses the original intention of the Reformation, I am convinced that it has a great mission in our time, provided we have the courage to follow its spirit without misgiving and live in harmony with its principles with an undaunted determination to endure unto the end" (*The Spirit of Protestantism*, p. 232).

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